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Sketches of South Georgia Folklife



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Publications of the American Folklife Center No. 2

COVER: *High Hill Baptist Church, Turner County*

Sketches of South Georgia Folklife

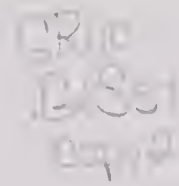
Edited by Carl Fleischhauer and Howard W. Marshall

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1977



The nine portraits in this volume are not the first published “sketches” of South Georgia folklife, for in 1918 J. L. Herring gathered together into a book entitled *Saturday Night Sketches* a series of affectionate portraits he had written for the *Tifton Daily Gazette*. His sketches were limned with words; ours lean more heavily upon photography. But despite the shift to a different medium and the lapse of a tumultuous half century, I am struck as I thumb through his essays by the similarities between his perception of the region and ours. Those similarities bespeak a fundamental continuity in the traditional life and work of the region which we are proud to celebrate here.

Our project dates from the day some months ago when Syd Blackmarr, Director of the Arts Experiment Station at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, called me in Washington, D.C., to talk about the cultural programming of her region. Our conversations, and subsequent discussions with others in her region, led to a six-week field project organized by the American Folklife Center this past summer in south-central Georgia. Folklife Center staff were joined by four professional folklorists—Tom Adler, Bill Lightfoot, Beverly Robinson, and Dave Stanley—to canvass the region and to document its patterns of traditional life,

work, and expression. The sketches in this volume, drawn together for the use and pleasure of the people of South Georgia, are the first product of that canvass.

We look forward to further products of our efforts. One of the most exciting aspects of the project for the American Folklife Center was the fact that we came at the invitation of and worked in cooperation with citizens and organizations concerned with the cultural nourishment of their communities. Their interest and commitment bodes well for the development of future programs within the region that draw upon South Georgia’s rich folk cultural resources.

Syd Blackmarr of the Arts Experiment Station has earned our deep gratitude for making the South-Central Georgia Folklife Project possible, pleasant, and productive. We owe thanks to the arts councils of the region for their help and encouragement. Local governmental units and the Georgia Council for the Arts and Humanities provided much-needed assistance in the project. Finally, we offer this book in gratitude, as well as in testimony, to the people of Ben Hill, Berrien, Colquitt, Cook, Irwin, Tift, Turner, and Worth County, who freely gave of their time, hospitality, and knowledge to help us in our work.

Alan Jabbour
Director, American Folklife Center





Church Homecoming. An annual church homecoming brings members who have moved away back together with their old friends and former neighbors. Bethel Baptist Church in southeastern Worth County held its annual homecoming on August 14. Much of the day was spent making music—hymns led in turn by different members, with occasional solos, quartets, or duets such as sung by Mr. and Mrs. Jack Green, pictured in the following section. Reverend Ralph Hobbs preached the sermon, and everyone enjoyed socializing during dinner hour in the fellowship hall.





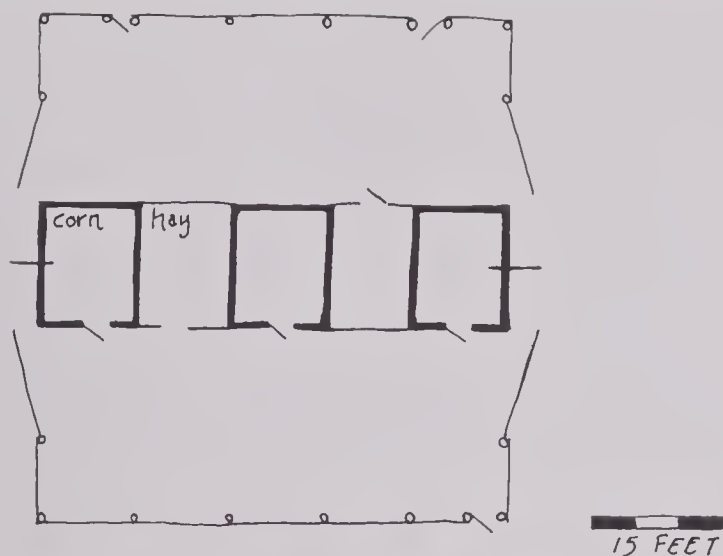






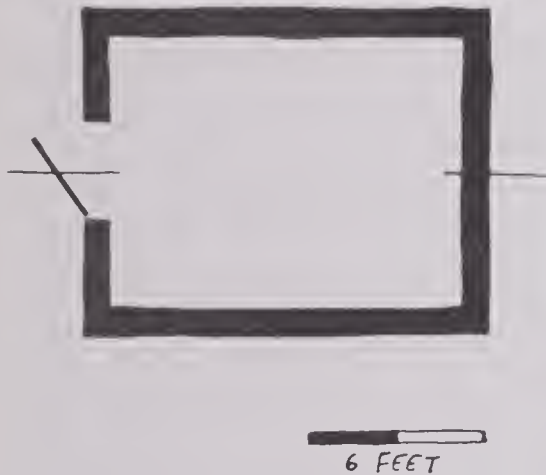
Gospel Concert. August 14 was also the day of the 15th Anniversary Concert of a Tifton gospel group, The Mighty Spiritual Crusaders. The concert was held at Traveler's Rest Church in Tifton, and groups from Ocilla, Sylvester, and Cordele also performed. Gospel concerts, which provide a shared expression of community beliefs and spirit, are important in the life of the region.





Living History. This large nineteenth-century barn on Mr. and Mrs. Elton Clark's farm in the Crosland community in northeastern Colquitt County serves as livestock shelter and storage for corn and hay. The three rectangular cribs, aligned and set high off the ground, are built of skinned pine logs and joined at the corners by saddle-notching. The barn is an example of traditional Lowland South techniques of building in wood, and in its layout is an extension of the more usual double-crib type.

Rectangular units are customary for all sorts of agricultural outbuildings. The same manner of crib or pen, whether frame or log, can serve as corn crib, tobacco or cotton packhouse, cook house, potato house, and here on the Clark farm as a smokehouse. The Clark smokehouse shares with many South Georgia buildings a sheltering projecting roof; the horizontal poles extending out over the door, from which hogs are hung for butchering, are more unusual.





Mr. Clark is a retired rural mail carrier and a fine local historian devoted to understanding and preserving the cultural past of the area. In the 1940 photograph he is holding, he demonstrates the use of the traditional well sweep at the farm. The building to the right of the well sweep is the Gibbs house, which the Clarks donated to the local history museum, Georgia Agrirama in Tifton, for reconstruction as part of the educational program. People like the Clarks provide a vital link between the generations and have important lessons to teach us about life and work in the past.



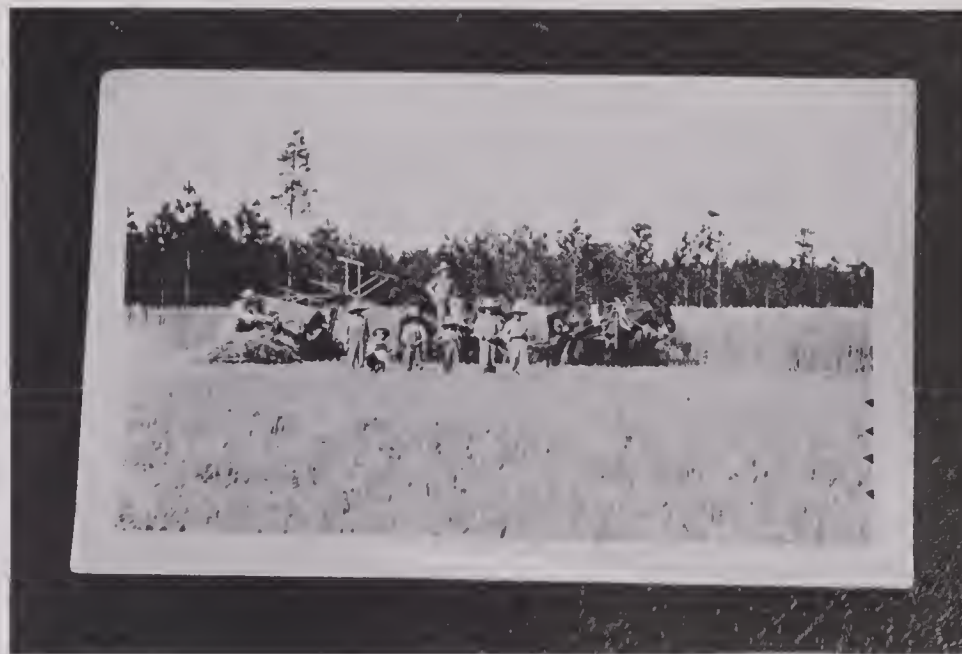
Fishing Trip. In Ben Hill County on a likely day in August, James Griffin and Lendon Sherret of Fitzgerald seine for shiners and other live bait in a slough near the Alapaha River. The men haul the boat to a nearby lake, and after a pleasant expedition with friends, the reward for Philip Jay is a fine largemouthed bass.





*The Royal Tabernacle, home of the Royal Singing Convention,
Mystic, Irwin County, 1916.*

From the Family Album



Harvesting wheat in M. N. Denham's field, Turner County, ca. 1920. Photo by Carlos Ross.



Mrs. Minnie Pearl Brown, Tifton, Tift County.



Mrs. Minnie Pearl Brown, Tifton, Tift County.



Carlos Ross, near Sycamore, Turner County, ca. 1920.



*Artie Lott, Cook County, ca. 1925.
Photo by Ben Green.*



*Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Lott Ross, Turner County,
ca. 1945. Photo by Carlos Ross.*



*Family homecoming near Live Oak Church, Turner County,
1920-30. Photo by Carlos Ross.*



Family Tobacco Harvest. Three generations work together to bring in Jimmy Akins's tobacco crop. Mr. Akins, his wife Carolyn, her father J. L. Yawn, and the Akins children, Becky, Lucy, and James, are joined by a neighbor, Terry Williams. According to Mr. Akins, Becky's job is the hardest. "The racks or sticks or whatever you call them need to be uniform," he said, "packed in such a way it'll cook and not fall off." The Akins and Yawn families live just north of Enigma in Berrien County.









Hunting Stories. Recorded August 12, at the home of Luther A. Bailey, sometimes known as “Lying” Bailey, south of Sycamore in Turner County.

Luther Bailey: You talking about hunting—you don’t know nothing about these coons, do you?

Bill Lightfoot: Not very much.

LB: You never did hunt a coon?

BL: I went on one coon hunt once, but that’s, that’s about the extent of it.

LB: Well they are mighty fast, when the first mile or two or three miles, you jump one. You just about the fastest thing on foot there is till they find a tree.

I had one of the best coon dogs going across them woods you ever saw. And he struck this durn coon and that coon went right out and across the open field. And they just looked like he was just going, going to catch that coon every minute. He was just biting at him. Woof, woof. And he quit. And he never did bark no more.

I took my lantern and went out across there, see could I find him, find out what was wrong. That dog was laying out there dead. And do you know—that coon was running so fast until them rings on his tail slipped off from his tail and went over that dog’s neck and choked him to death.

LB: We had one old man, old Colley Claghorn, over here, he was a terrible hunter. Say he had the best dog that ever been.

Carl Fleischhauer: What was his name?

LB: Colley Claghorn.

CF: Colley?

LB: Yeah. He had them black-backed Tennessee hounds.

CF: Mm.

LB: And he run a ad all up there in Tennessee and all around, sell this dog. And this multi-millionaire wanted a dog and he come down to try him out. And they went out. Well the dog struck soon as they in the woods and directly he treed.

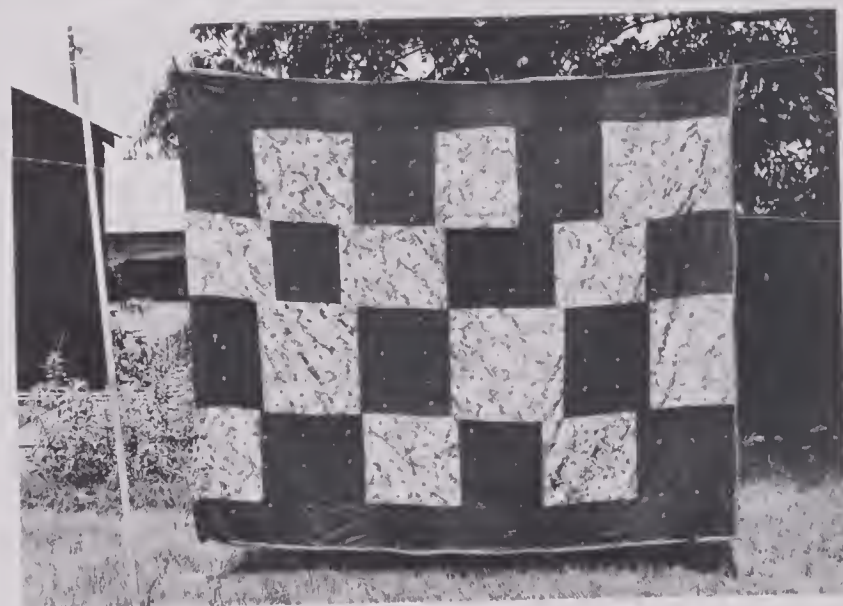
And they got there, said, “Well, he’s a good one, he put him up real quick.” Splashing the light all up there in the tree, see could they see him. Says, “Mr. Claghorn,” he says, “they ain’t no coon up this tree.” He says, “Oh, I forgot to tell you,” he says, “that dog’s thirty minutes ahead of that coon.” He said, “Just wait, he’ll be here in a little while.”

Marty Ray: He did have some good coon dogs. That was—he, he was the same man that had one of them coon dogs he had to keep one plug in one nostril to keep from tracking two at once, he said.



In Lenox, Georgia. John R. Griffin, eighty, plays a lively “Love My Sweetheart Good as Anybody” while his brother Arthur, in his seventies, “beats the straws,” adding a staccato rhythmic drone by striking the violin strings with a broom straw. Mr. Griffin’s style and repertory reflect the older traditions of instrumental dance music in South Georgia. He grew up in rural Cook County but has lived for many years in Lenox, one of many towns built along the railroads of the region.







Etta Anderson. Mrs. Etta Anderson lives with her husband in a large center-hall house on the north side of Ocilla in Irwin County. She is a quiltermaker and a student of wild and domestic plants, which she uses both to prepare home remedies and for food. She makes jams, jellies, and preserves and cans fruits and garden vegetables. Two of her grandchildren, Oscar Anderson and Tisha Bryant, are shown on the following pages in the front living room and together with Mrs. Anderson in the kitchen at the back of her house.





The materials used in this booklet were collected by the fieldwork team between July 11 and August 21, 1977. The Bethel Church homecoming was attended by William E. Lightfoot and Thomas A. Adler. The Mighty Spiritual Crusaders concert and Mrs. Etta Anderson were visited by Beverly J. Robinson. Mr. and Mrs. Elton Clark were visited by Howard W. Marshall. David H. Stanley went along on the fishing trip and visited the Akins and Yawn families. Luther A. Bailey was visited by Lightfoot. Alan Jabbour visited in Lenox with John R. and Arthur Griffin. Carl Fleischhauer accompanied the fieldworkers to the homecoming, the gospel concert, and on some of their visits to the Akins, Yawn, Bailey, Griffin, and Anderson homes.

Photographs: Marshall, cover and pp. 10-13. Adler, p. 6 bottom. Stanley, pp. 14-16 and p. 23 right. Robinson, p. 28 left and p. 29. The remaining photographs are by Fleischhauer.

The maps and floorplans are by Marshall.



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